

The Washington Times, September 9, 2008

PRAGUE, The Czech Republic.

Neville Chamberlain once called the nation of which this city was the capital in 1938, "a faraway country" with "people of whom we know nothing." With those words, he reneged on Britain's alliance with Czechoslovakia, abandoning it to Adolf Hitler's quest for "breathing room" for the German people and the rest, as they say, is history.

In recent months, the United States has undertaken important new security commitments with the Czech Republic and Poland in the face of emerging threats to those countries, the rest of Europe and indeed the Free World more generally from a regime whose aspirations are arguably even more ominous than those of the Nazis: the Islamic Republic of Iran.

After all, the mullahocracy of Iran seeks, in the words of its front man, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to bring about the return of the 12th Imam, a messianic figure known in Shi'ite Iran as the Mahdi. The trouble is, according to the ayatollahs, the precondition to the Mahdi's ushering in of the golden age of Islam is something that sounds a lot like the apocalypse.

As a result, it is advisable to take seriously threats issuing forth with great regularity from Tehran to the effect that Israel will be "wiped off the map" and that it is "desirable and achievable" to bring about "a world without America." Iranian ballistic missiles have demonstrated the ability to reach distant targets like Tel Aviv, parts of the European Continent and, if launched from ships, the United States.

If used to detonate nuclear weapons in space over targeted nations, such missiles could unleash electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks, resulting in widespread destruction of electrical grids and what a congressional commission has described as the "catastrophic" disruption of civilizations reliant upon them. A world without America could be the practical result of such a strategic EMP attack here, as the United States is reduced to a pre-industrial society.

Against such a threat, the Bush administration has begun to put into place modest anti-missile defenses. Deployed ashore in Alaska and California and aboard a growing number of naval vessels, these systems afford some protection against certain ballistic missile-delivered attacks on the United States.

The United States has also concluded agreements with the governments of Poland and the Czech Republic that will allow the fielding of 10 land-based interceptors and an X-band radar, respectively, in the two nations. These systems will extend very limited missile defenses to our allies in Europe and permit some additional capability to intercept future intercontinental-range Iranian missiles aimed at the United States.

These benefits will accrue, however, only if the Congress agrees to fund such deployments and the associated military construction. As of this writing, Democrats in the House of Representatives have declined to do so. Thankfully, a Republican member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois, will offer Tuesday an amendment designed to honor America's commitment to its European allies and provide the protection they and we need at an absolute minimum.

The Kirk amendment has taken on greater urgency in the aftermath of Russia's recent, devastating invasion of another "faraway country" - the sovereign, democratic and pro-Western republic of Georgia. Even though the Polish-based interceptors and the radar in the Czech Republic represent no threat to Moscow's ability to destroy Europe should it choose to do so, Vladimir Putin is determined to try to stop their deployment.

The Kremlin has gone so far as to threaten nuclear attacks on the basing countries if they proceed with their efforts to defend themselves and others from the menace posed by Moscow's ally, Iran.

It appears Mr. Putin hopes to engineer a "re-do" of the 1983 deployment of U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing II ballistic missiles in five West European countries. Back then, the NATO alliance held firm in the face of an all-out Soviet campaign to block the basing of such weapons and destabilize the governments involved. The failure of that campaign marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, an event Mr. Putin mourns as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" and one he evidently seeks to reverse.

It would be unconscionable for the Congress now to give Mr. Putin - fresh from his rape of Georgia - a new and far more strategic victory by denying the funds needed to implement the missile defense agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic. Not only would doing so assure that Europe remained vulnerable to nuclear blackmail, or worse, from Iran. Not only would it deny the United States additional protection from Iranian missiles intended to bring about a world with this country.

A refusal to take the corrective action proposed by Mark Kirk would signal that the West, once again, views with indifference the security concerns of our allies. It will encourage the belief in Moscow and elsewhere that our time's most powerful democracy will, like its predecessor 70 years ago, abandon its friends to the appetites of their rapacious neighbors.

The vote in the Appropriations Committee Tuesday is an opportunity to demonstrate instead to our friends here in Prague, to America's allies around the world and to our actual and prospective foes that, despite the intense partisanship of this election season, Democrats and Republicans alike will honor our national commitments and stand together in defense of freedom.